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## Kenny Talks Boilermaker Football



*Photo courtesy of Purdue Athletics*



**KENNY THOMPSON**  
Columnist

## Boilers Have Some Bright Spots In Otherwise Season-Opening Loss

A bright spot from Purdue football's 39-35 season-opening loss to Fresno State was the play of Westfield graduate Dillon

Thieneman.

In his first collegiate game, the safety played so well that the Big Ten Conference honored Thieneman as its Freshman of the Week.

Thieneman recorded a team-high 10 solo tackles and his fourth-quarter interception resulted in a go-ahead touchdown. Thieneman is just the third Purdue true freshman to intercept a pass in their debut, joining James Dunnigan in 1999 against UCF and Josh Hayes vs. Eastern Kentucky in 2016.

Thieneman also is the first defensive Boilermaker to earn Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors since cornerback Frankie Williams in 2012.

"I was very, very pleased and excited for him, but I wasn't surprised," first-year coach Ryan Walters said Tuesday. "The beautiful thing about football is that it doesn't matter how old you are. He has deserved his spot on the roster and his spot on the depth chart."

It didn't go unnoticed by at least one media member that Thieneman plays 15-20 yards off the line of scrimmage.

"That depth allows him to see the quarterback, allows him to see things kind of unfolding in front of him to be able to put him in position to go make plays," Walters said.

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Football notes

Calling the new Purdue football staff "a great mix of experience and young and hungry to prove themselves," Football Scoop has rated Ryan Walters' assistants the fifth most impressive new staff of 2023.

Author Doug Samuels' praise begins with the addition of offensive coordinator Graham Harrell.

"The ability to grab Graham Harrell from West Virginia could prove to be the most impressive coordinator hire of the entire off season in college football, in my opinion.

"Purdue teams that have been able to win 8 games or more in a season have both been led by offensive-minded head coaches

(Joe Tiller and Jeff Brohm), so Purdue going outside of that trend to land one of the most impressive defensive coordinators in college football as their new leader meant that the offensive coordinator hire was absolutely critical.

"In Harrell, the Boilermakers land someone that has called games on big stages, and at a blue-blood program like USC. His philosophy will allow them to maximize the talent on the roster, as there will be some schematic carryover from what Brohm was doing, and will allow them to continue to recruit and develop playmakers on the perimeter and vertical threats, similar to what that they've been churning out the last few years."

But it's the defense that provides the biggest challenge to this staff. Samuels sees Fresno State, Wisconsin and Ohio State at home, plus Michigan and Nebraska on the road as games that will hinge on the Boilermakers' defensive talents.

"Walters and (defensive coordinator Kevin) Kane were able to engineer a quick turnaround defensively at Illinois, and whether they'll be able to do the same with the Black and Gold I see being the biggest challenge ahead for the program.

The good news is that, in addition to Kane, Walters was able to bring in veteran defensive line coach Brick Haley to mentor the defensive front. With experience at LSU and Texas and in the NFL with the Bears on his resume, Haley infuses some incredible experience on the defensive side of the ball."

Samuels also called former Illinois assistant Cory Patterson as the "most intriguing hire." Patterson is credited for coaching running back Chase Brown into an All-American last season.

Wisconsin (2nd) and Nebraska (4th) were the other Big Ten staffs ranked by Football Scoop. ...

Purdue quarterback Hudson Card ranked 43rd among The Athletic's Top 100 athletes from the college football transfer portal. Card was the eighth overall quarterback on the list, which was topped by overall No. 1 Sam Hartman of Notre Dame. Big Ten rivals Tanner Mordecai of Wisconsin (7th) and Jeff Sims of Nebraska (36th) were listed ahead of Card.

"Card may be one of the transfer QBs in this cycle who benefits most from a change in scenery," The Athletic analysis stated. "The 6-foot-2, 210-pound redshirt junior is ready to fully prove what he can do. He won the starting job at Texas going into 2021 but couldn't hold on to it.

"Card got back on the field early last season when Quinn Ewers was knocked

out of the Alabama game and played well despite an ankle injury, throwing for 899 yards with six touchdowns and one interception during his four-game stretch as starter. He has quickly won over his new team and was voted a team captain heading into coach Ryan Walters' debut season."

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Great expectations

The return of National Player of the Year Zach Edey will once again keep Purdue in the college basketball spotlight according to The Athletic's CJ Moore and Sam Vecenie, who rank the Boilermakers fourth in their preseason rankings.

Kansas, Marquette and Duke are slotted ahead of Purdue. The Boilermakers are among four Big Ten Conference teams in The Athletic's Top 25, joined by Michigan State (6th), Illinois (14th) and Wisconsin (15th).

"This team is built similarly to a year ago with just slightly more depth. Everything once again will revolve around Zach Edey, but it looks like Matt Painter might diversify his offense with some more ball-screen action," The Athletic duo's analysis states. "Purdue needs to move Edey around when teams bracket him in the post like Fairleigh Dickinson did. Painter said two years ago that he preferred to be different and run far fewer ball screens than the rest of college basketball.

"The Boilermakers ranked 316th in ball-screen usage last year, but that number could tick up if you want to read into how they played on their foreign tour, which was without Edey. Braden Smith, who looks like he's added some muscle, worked out of a lot of ball screens in the middle of the floor and usually made the right read — he had 42 assists and only seven turnovers in four games. (In Purdue's final game on the tour, we counted 29 ball screens. That's more than we're used to seeing from Painter's offense.) Smith, who had seven turnovers in the shocking first-round NCAA Tournament loss to FDU, will also benefit from the addition of a secondary handler in grad transfer Lance Jones.

"The key for Purdue will be making perimeter shots. It's a lot harder to pull off the kind of defensive plan FDU used if the Boilermakers make the open jumpers that the attention around Edey creates. They need a good year from Fletcher Loyer, who shot just 32.6 percent from 3 as a freshman but has the potential to shoot way better than that number."

Oddly, The Athletic lists "continuity" among Marquette's strengths while not listing it among Purdue's assets. All five starters return and six of the top eight scor-

ers. In today's transfer portal word, it's difficult to be more stable than those facts.

To the surprise of absolutely no one in college basketball, Edey was selected pre-season National Player of the Year by Blue Ribbon Yearbook.

Not since UCLA's Bill Walton in 1971-72 and 1972-73 has anyone been a consensus, back-to-back National Player of the Year.

Walton's Bruins won national championships in both seasons.

Jamie Shaw of On3.com lists Purdue among the 10 schools he believes can win the national championship.

"The last top overall seed to get ousted by a 16-seed in round one, Virginia, went on to win it all next year," Shaw writes. "This team also adds top 100 freshman wing Myles Colvin. Will this be the year Matt Painter shakes his college basketball postseason stigma?"

The other schools on Shaw's list, in alphabetical order: Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Duke, Houston, Kansas, Kentucky, Miami and Michigan State.

Purdue fans are also anticipating a memorable season, snatching up all 9,000 available season tickets for the third consecutive season. Purdue athletic officials state the renewal rate approached 99 percent. Single-game and multi-game ticket packages are still available.

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## First Of Many Ross-Ade Stadium And Discussing A Record Setting Win

Purdue is celebrating 100 seasons in Ross-Ade Stadium, and what better time than now to reflect on the 10 most memorable games I've attended in the 99-year-old facility.

(Ross-Ade was dedicated on Nov. 22, 1924 with a Homecoming victory against Indiana. Even though Purdue's other home games were at Stuart Field in 1924, I guess the matchup with the Hoosiers counts as Year 1.)

Not every game on this list will go down in Boilermaker lore, but it's my list.

10. Sept. 8, 1979: Purdue 41, Wisconsin 20 – My first game as a Purdue student, and the ticket was free since football season tickets were part of the tuition package at the time.

I can still envision the game's first touchdown. A high spiral from Mark Herrmann that found a wide-open Raymond Smith in stride for a 41-yard score. The game was barely five minutes old, and I thought Purdue fans were in for a fun season.

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I was right. The 1979 season remains the only 10-win campaign in Boilermaker football history.

9. Nov. 3, 2018: Purdue 38, No. 19 Iowa 36 – After losing twice on last-second field goals earlier in the season, the Boilermakers finally had fate on their side when Spencer Evans kicked the first game-winner of his career from 25 yards with eight seconds to play.

David Blough and Terry Wright hooked up for touchdown passes of 41, 82 and 3 to give Purdue a 35-23 lead after three quarters.

8. Nov. 25, 2017: Purdue 31, Indiana 24 – Boilermaker fans officially awakened from the four-year nightmare known as Darrell Hazell by recapturing the Old Oak-En Bucket and earning a berth in the Foster Farms Bowl.

“It’s a great moment for our football team, our university, for our fans,” said first-year coach Jeff Brohm, who took Purdue from a 3-9 mark under Hazell and interim coach Gerad Parker in 2016 to a 7-6 record in his first season. “I couldn’t be prouder.”

Purdue held on after building a 31-10 lead early in the fourth quarter on two touchdown runs by Jackson Anthrop and Elijah Sindelar touchdown passes to Anthony Mahoungou and Isaac Zico.

7. Sept. 12, 1981: Purdue 27, No. 19 Stanford 19 – The third-largest crowd in Ross-Ade history (69,958) and a national TV audience witnessed plenty of excitement.

Jimmy Smith matched the Boilermaker and stadium record with a 100-yard kickoff return. Future Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback John Elway threw for a career-high 418 yards, and Stanford kicker Mark Harmon (not the actor) set the school and stadium record with a 59-yard field goal.

Smith would rush for a game-high 91 yards and added two more touchdowns. Scott Campbell added a 29-yard TD pass to Steve Bryant.

6. Oct. 25, 1980: Purdue 36, Michigan State 25 – An NCAA record fell, and fittingly Purdue’s Carmel Connection was the reason.

Mark Herrmann’s 14-yard pass to Bart Burrell made the senior quarterback the NCAA’s all-time leading passer. At game’s end, Herrmann’s record stood at 8,087 yards. He would leave Purdue with 9,354 yards, the first man in NCAA history to eclipse 8,000 and 9,000 yards.

“The fact Bart caught it made it more

of a thrill,” Herrmann said of Burrell, his teammate for three years in junior high school, three years at Carmel and four at Purdue.

5. Nov. 22, 1980: Purdue 24, Indiana 23 – For the second time that season, Purdue set a Ross-Ade and state attendance record with 71,629 fans.

They got their money’s worth in Mark Herrmann’s final home game. Herrmann threw for 252 of his 323 yards in the second half to rally the Boilermakers from a 10-3 deficit. Ben McCall scored the game-winning touchdown with 8:56 to play, and linebacker Mike Marks batted away a two-point conversion pass with 17 seconds left to seal the victory.

Purdue finished tied for second in the Big Ten with Ohio State at 7-1 and would defeat Missouri in the Liberty Bowl to finish 9-3 overall.

4. Sept. 26, 1981: Purdue 15, No. 13 Notre Dame 14 – The Fighting Irish led 14-7 with 2:57 to go when first-year starting quarterback Scott Campbell went to work in front of 70,007 fans.

Starting from the Boilermaker 20, Campbell threw 12 yards to Jimmy Smith, 28 to Eric Jordan and 42 yards to Steve Bryant (there were tackles for losses by Notre Dame in between) to put the ball at the Irish 1.

A 6-yard loss on first-and-goal and two incomplete passes made it fourth down with 23 seconds remaining. Assistant coach Dick Dullaghan, who was in between high school coaching stints that saw him collect eight state titles, called for “the Sail.”

Bryant, one on one with Notre Dame sophomore Chris Brown on the left side, got a step advantage and caught Campbell’s pass to make it 14-13 with 19 seconds remaining.

“Give him credit for an excellent play,” Purdue head coach Jim Young said afterward.

Young decided to go for the win and called the same play but with Bryant lining up on the right side. This time, Bryant outjumped Brown for the game-winning two-point conversion.

“I think being a former basketball player allowed me to make the catch,” Bryant said. “It was a much tougher catch than the touchdown.”

3. Sept. 23, 1979: No. 17 Purdue 28, No. 5 Notre Dame 22 – It’s nice to boast that I was part of the largest crowd in Indiana football history to that point (70,567). At the time, that figure was 1,367 above Ross-Ade Stadium capacity.

As a lowly freshman, I got an aisle seat in the student section. In all, Purdue seated 367 people in the aisles and the other thousand in portable chairs along the north end zone.

The Boilermakers rallied from a 13-point deficit to beat the Fighting Irish for the first time in five years. Wally Jones’ 2-yard run at the end of the third quarter gave Purdue the lead for good, 21-20. Herrmann found old Carmel High School teammate Bart Burrell for the clinching 6-yard touchdown with 8:41 to go.

“Those are the kinds of wins that keep the memories going,” Herrmann said recently on PurdueSports’ YouTube series profiling Ross-Ade’s Greatest Games. “It was our only 10-win season in Purdue history, and the defense gets a lot of credit for that.”

2. Nov. 22, 1986: Purdue 17, Indiana 15 – For the longest time, this ranked as the greatest game I witnessed in Ross-Ade Stadium.

Press boxes are usually business-like but in the minutes before kickoff, there was notable surprise expressed when the Boilermakers returned to the field in gold jerseys. Players had gone through pre-game warmups in their usual home black jerseys.

It was already known that All-American cornerback Rod Woodson would play a greater role than usual in his final collegiate game. But no one was prepared for what they saw over the next two-and-a-half hours.

From his first collegiate rushing attempt, a 14-yard gain, Woodson stamped his mark of greatness that day. His 93 yards on 15 carries was the top performance by any Purdue running back during a dismal 3-8 season that cost head coach Leon Burnett his job.

But that’s not all. Woodson caught three passes for 67 yards, returned three punts for 30 yards and brought two kickoff returns for 46 yards.

From his cornerback position, Woodson made 10 tackles and broke up a pass.

He was even involved in the game-deciding play, teaming up with Scott Schult to block a game-winning 35-yard field goal attempt by future NFL kicker Pete Stoyanovich.

“The thing that I will always remember is seeing Rod Woodson on that final play,” Burnett said years later. “I still see that play in my imagination.”

1. Oct. 20, 2018: Purdue 49, No. 2 Ohio State 20 – This will be known forever as “the Tyler Trent game.”

Hours after a heart-wrenching interview of the terminally ill Purdue student on ESPN, during which Trent predicted a Purdue victory, the Boilermakers made that wish come true.

Mike Carmin of the Journal & Courier described the scene perfectly as the final seconds ticked off:

“More than 10,000 students stayed through the cold and blustery conditions, waiting to rush the field as the Boilermakers dominated Ohio State from the second quarter through the final buzzer.”

A 35-point second half included these memorable moments:

Columbus native Markus Bailey returning an interception 41 yards for the final touchdown;

Rondale Moore’ 43-yard catch and run for a touchdown, bouncing off defenders left and right;

D.J. Knox sprinting away from Ohio State defenders for three touchdowns, including runs of 42 and 34 yards.

It also was the fifth time in eight visits to Ross-Ade Stadium that Ohio State left with a loss. To realize what a major accomplishment this was, Michigan has only won twice in Columbus since 2000.

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Record-setting win

Virginia Tech athletic officials say the five hour, 27-minute weather delay during Purdue’s 24-17 victory is the longest in college football history.

The game was supposed to kick off at 12:01 p.m. this past Saturday but lightning in the area delayed the kick until 12:23. With Purdue leading 7-0 in the first quarter, play was stopped again at 12:48 p.m. due to lightning being within a 10-mile radius of the stadium.

The eight hours and 35 minutes total elapsed time from the opening kickoff to the game clock hitting 0:00 is believed to be the longest game in Virginia Tech history.

The previous record for an in-game delay was 3 hours and 55 minutes between TCU and Kansas State in 2017. In 2021, East Carolina and Houston had the start of their game delayed for 5 hours and 20 minutes.

The 4.41 inches of rain in Blacksburg was second all-time to the 4.48 inches of rain on Aug. 14, 1940, according to the National Weather Service.

*Kenny Thompson is the former sports editor for the Lafayette Journal & Courier and an award-winning journalist. He has covered Purdue athletics for many years.*



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